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ABSTRACT

In 1995, the International Consultative Forum on Education for All commissioned case studies in developing countries as part of a mid-decade review of progress in expanding access to basic education. This paper examines the situation in Mongolia and reports on two surveys about dropouts. In the early 1990s, Mongolia shifted from a centrally planned economy to a market economy. Liberalizing the Mongolian economy created economic instability reflected in lower living standards, unemployment, and higher prices. Educational costs rose, resulting in reduced teacher salaries and school closings. With half of its population under age 19, Mongolia's future is linked to the success of its schools. Although education is compulsory through grade 8 and secondary education is free, dropout rates rose drastically in the early 1990s. Overwhelmingly, dropouts were rural males; an estimated 44 percent left school to help their parents raise cattle. Allowing private ownership of cattle herds has been a key element of economic liberalization but apparently has increased the need for child labor at home. Surveys were conducted with 220 teachers and 250 dropouts. Teachers cited cattle breeding as the top reason for dropout. On the other hand, although 93 children had fathers who were herdsmen, cattle breeding and "need to help parents" were not among the children's top five reasons. Lack of interest in studying was the most highly rated mutual choice. Most children desired further schooling, and teachers and children favored alternative programming, but lack of funding is a major obstacle. (SV)

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ED 425 890

MID-DECADE REVIEW OF PROGRESS TOWARDS EDUCATION FOR ALL

CASE STUDY

MONGOLIA

INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATIVE FORUM
ON EDUCATION FOR ALL

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FOREWORD

Five years after the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand 1990, **the International Consultative Forum on Education for All** (the EFA Forum) undertook a review of how far countries have come in their efforts to reach Education for All.

This stocktaking of progress was done by various means. It drew on statistics and reports done by ministries of education all over the world. To complement these governmental reports, the EFA Forum asked a number of independent researchers in developing countries to provide a more in-depth view of Education for All in their countries.

From among these case studies on interesting experiences in providing basic education, we have selected a few for publication. For example, these studies look at the challenges of getting girls to stay in school and complete their primary education even though they are needed in the household economy or the school environment is geared to boys; efforts to provide education in emergency situations due to war and conflict; and the provision of education in the mother tongue of the pupils to promote learning. In short, these case studies deal with some of the current issues in basic education worldwide, and they shed light on the varying conditions in which basic education takes place. The approach and perspective vary between the studies, reflecting the diversity of the actors involved in EFA. We hope you will find these studies interesting reading.

The authors of the case studies have been selected and contracted by field offices of UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO. These offices also proposed the themes of the studies. The EFA Forum Secretariat wishes to extend its thanks to the authors and the field offices that have provided efficient assistance in carrying out these case studies.

These case studies are written by independent researchers and consultants. The views expressed on policies, programmes and projects are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the EFA Forum.

Final editing was done by the Secretariat of the EFA Forum.

SCHOOL DROP-OUTS IN MONGOLIA

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AUTHORS' PREFACE

The Mongolian government has proclaimed 1996 as the "Year of Education." As the profound political and economic changes of the last five years continue, maintaining Mongolia's tradition of at least eight years of basic education for every citizen is a crucial goal of the nation's leaders, a goal which corresponds fully with the principles proclaimed by the 1990 EFA Conference in Thailand.

The following report has been written in response to results of a survey of drop-out, conducted between 15 November and 15 December 1995, with the cooperation of 220 teachers and 250 children. The survey gathered information about students dropping out of school with the hope of facilitating the elaboration of an effective policy to combat this growing phenomenon in Mongolia.

The writers of this study would like to thank UNESCO, the UNDP representative in Mongolia, the Ministry of Science and Education (MOSE) Policy and Coordination Office staff, and educational centres in Ulaanbaatar, Dornogovi, Govi-Altai, Urvurhangai aimags for their invaluable assistance in carrying out the study.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION 4

CHAPTER TWO - COUNTRY PROFILE 4

CHAPTER THREE - AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM 5

3.1 Educational Limitations in 1995 5
3.2 Fewer Schools, Fewer Students 5
3.3 The Drop-Out Phenomenon 6
3.4 Survey Results 7

CHAPTER FOUR - CONCLUSIONS 8

List of Acronyms 9

ANNEX
Annex 1. Tables 10

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Since 1990, Mongolia has undergone a transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy. As part of this change, new political structures have been created, including a new constitution, finished in 1992, and open elections. At the same time, however, there has been a dramatic increase in the drop-out rate in the nation's schools. This growing drop-out rate is of great concern to all those responsible for guiding Mongolia into the future.

The following study represents an effort to better understand why children are leaving school before completing their eight years of compulsory basic education. It contains the results of two surveys conducted at the end of 1995 in which teachers and children were asked a series of questions designed to give a more accurate picture of the drop-out phenomenon. As a build-up to the survey results, the study begins with a brief portrait of Mongolia in the mid-1990s, as well as a presentation of general educational data. Finally, the study concludes with some proposals in response to the survey's findings.

CHAPTER TWO - COUNTRY PROFILE

The urgent need to find solutions to the problem of children leaving school becomes clear given an essential fact about the population of Mongolia. 49.7% of the 2.27 million Mongolians are under the age of 19. Thus, issues of basic education involve a considerable portion of the entire nation both now and well into the foreseeable future.

Mongolia's 1.6 million square kilometres bordering to China and Russia make up the 16th largest country in the world in terms of land mass. With only 2.27 million people living in this land of desert, steppe, and forests, Mongolia has an extremely low population density (approximately 1.3 persons per square kilometre) although 51% of the population lives in cities and urban areas. The nation is made up of 20 different ethnic groups, the majority being Halhs. 90% of the population is Buddhist while the Kazakhs of the far west are members of the Sunni Muslim faith.

While a clear idea of demographic realities establishes one framework for appreciating the importance of the drop-out question, noting the economic changes of the first half of this decade provides another essential context. Liberalising the Mongolian economy has created an initial period of economic instability which translates into, in many cases, lower living standards, unemployment, and inflation. For example, the price of basic goods and services rose from the end of 1994 to September 1995 by 43.3%. The unemployment rate in 1994 was 8%. These new fluctuations affect education in a variety of ways: such as increases in the cost of lighting and heating schools and dormitories, transporting and feeding of students, printing textbooks and other study materials, and salary reductions for teachers and parents while hiking the costs of teacher training.

Table 1 illustrates this basic picture of the Mongolian economy during the last few years. Given the beginnings of an economic turnaround, the proclamation of the "Year of Education" grows out of a climate of optimism.

Table 1. Gross domestic product

	GROWTH IN GDP	GDP PER CAPITA (IN THOUSANDS TUG ABSOLUTE)
1990	-2.5	5.04
1991	-9.2	8.88
1992	-9.5	21.72
1993	-3.0	74.83
1994	2.3	125.39
1995 (ESTIMATED)	5.7	164.75

With such a small population, the economic future of Mongolia is absolutely linked to the success of its schools: labour-intensive industry being a relatively difficult option, it is in the development of a well-educated citizenry that industries based on scientific, technical and professional skills can flourish.

CHAPTER THREE - AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of children dropping out of school needs to be understood not only in terms of the overall political and economic changes occurring in Mongolia, but also within a strictly educational context. Thus, the following section begins with a presentation of the educational initiatives of 1995 along with a statement of the basic parameters of the current drop-out phenomenon. An appendix contains a series of tables which provide further information about the number of schools, of students, about education levels among the adult population, and recent budget figures for education.

3.1 Educational Initiatives in 1995

The designation of 1996 as a "Year of Education" has its origins in a set of legislative initiatives undertaken by parliament during 1995. The State Education Policy, the Education Law, the Higher Education Law, and the Primary and Secondary Education Law represent, collectively, a renewed commitment to establishing education as a top priority in the overall development of Mongolian society.

Enacted in August 1995, the package of laws reflects a set of basic principles:

-that education is to be sponsored, supported, and coordinated by the state but not limited to state control;

-that no form of discrimination, whether on the basis of social origin, race, colour,

or conviction, is to prevent anyone from having access to education;

-that primary education through grade eight is compulsory;

-that secondary education is free of charge;

-that parents are responsible for insuring that children under 17 are educated to the appropriate level, and are subject to a fine of 10000-250000 tug if they pull their children out of school without authorization;

-that the state has a duty to furnish adequate working conditions for teachers as well as establish realistic guidelines for assessing their work;

-that the state is responsible for developing a coherent curriculum; and

-that no vocational training takes place that puts the health and security of individuals at risk.

Along with the basic principles, the State Education Policy contains particular measures that are important to the question of children dropping out of school. The legislation calls for the creation of educational alternatives, both formal and non-formal, to meet the needs of those out of school. It also establishes a spending quota for education within the yearly national budget. By law now, 20% of the national budget must be devoted to education. An additional budgetary measure introduced by the State Education Policy is that local authorities have been made responsible for financing alternative educational programmes for drop-outs.

3.2 Fewer Schools, Fewer Students

Public education in Mongolia began in 1921 with the establishment of the first primary school. Since then, the system has developed into a comprehensive progression all the way from kindergartens to the university level, through combined primary and secondary schools (general secondary school), vocational schools, and evening schools (see Annex).

Mongolia's small population has made it possible to attain high levels of literacy. However, since 1990 the number of schools and students has been shrinking, thus threatening this achievement. One reason for the decline in the number of schools since 1990 is the consolidation of various small, expensive institutions. Many kindergartens have been forced to close because of the economic crisis of the last few years. Similarly, some of the vocational schools that were associated with agricultural and industrial enterprises were closed down once the sponsoring enterprises were privatised. It appears as though the general estimation of the importance of education has also changed in the last few years. This change in particular has led to increased drop out rates. One positive development has been the growth in private university programmes which has allowed more citizens to pursue some form of higher education.

3.3 The Drop-out Phenomenon

According to Ministry of Science and Education statistics, in the school year 1995-1996 there were a total of 416,213 children between the ages of eight and 15. Of that total, 51,544 children were not in school. 38,867 of those children were defined as drop-outs -- students who have left school -- as opposed to the 12,677 others who have never attended school. The majority of those who have never attended school are disabled children for whom special schools have been established. Unfortunately, many of those schools are inoperative because of lack of funds. The number of drop-outs for the current school year can be compared with the figures from preceding years provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Drop-outs by academic year (in thousands)

	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
1991-1992	33.5	24.3	9.2
1992-1993	33.8	21.2	12.6
1993-1994	23.1	14.1	9.0

Source: MOSE Statistics 1994-1995

As the table indicates, a sizeable majority of the children leaving school are male. Another factor that helps to define the contours of the problem is that the drop-out rate is relatively low in Ulaanbaatar (1.1%) and other urban centres. Thus, the drop-out phenomenon can be understood as a problem that is more common among males in rural areas. This tendency becomes more clear in light of the fact that an estimated 44.4% of the children who have left school have done so in order to help their parents breed cattle. Allowing private ownership of cattle herds has been one of the key elements of the liberalisation of the Mongolian economy; an outgrowth of this change appears to be that more and more children are becoming an important source of labour. See Tables in Annex for more information on schooling in Mongolia.

3.4 Survey Results

The original research for this report consists of two surveys conducted with teachers and drop-outs from Dundgovi, Govi-Altai, and Ulaanbaatar. The data from the two surveys has been arranged in Tables 3 - 8 (in Annex), which present information on various items as follows:.

The most striking finding from the two surveys is the difference in response between teachers and children as to why children drop-out of school. Teachers cited cattle breeding more than any other reason as the cause for students dropping out of school. Children, on the other hand, did not specifically mention cattle breeding, nor did the "need to help parents" figure into their top five responses. A lack of interest in studying was the number one mutual response between teachers and children. However, of the 250 out-of-school children who participated in the survey, 93 had fathers who were herdsmen, the largest single profession represented among the group of young respondents.

A majority of the children expressed a desire to return to some form of schooling, and

a majority of teachers and a plurality of children preferred the idea of some form of education designed especially for drop-outs. However, as responsibility for such initiatives has been shifted to the local level, the fact that only 49 of the 220 teachers questioned claimed that they were, in fact, organising such alternative programmes is discouraging. The principal obstacles to setting up alternative programmes appears to be funding, attracting students, and obtaining sufficient teaching materials. Many teachers suggested that some form of financing from the national education budget be earmarked for dealing with the drop-out phenomenon.

CHAPTER FIVE - CONCLUSIONS

Since both children and teachers expressed a preference for special alternative educational programmes for drop-outs, such programmes need to take advantage of the fact that cattle herding is seasonal work so that any educational innovation needs to occur close to the herdsmen. Funding for drop-out programmes remains a major obstacle, particularly given the shift of responsibility to local government and parents. Currently UNESCO and Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA) support programmes but they cannot handle all of the children out of school. Support for educational programmes for this group of children is one area where Mongolia is particularly open to international involvement.

More surveys like the two presented above need to be conducted with a wider group of respondents, particularly local authorities and parents. This kind of research is essential to forging a national strategy in response to the drop-out problem.

List of Acronyms

DANIDA	Danish International Development Assistance
MOSE	Ministry of Science and Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Annex 1. Tables

Table 3. Number of schools by level

	1990	1994	1995
KINDERGARTEN	909	696	660
GENERAL SECONDARY (PRIMARY & SECONDARY)	634	659	664
TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL	44	28	34
SPECIAL VOCATIONAL	31	35	27
UNIVERSITY -OF THEM PRIVATE	8 -	41 31	62 41
EVENING SCHOOL	927	850	56
TOTAL	927	850	843

SOURCE: Mongolian Economy and Society in 1994 Statistical Year book, Ulaanbaatar, 1995, p. 118-124, MOSE Statistics, 1995-1996

Table 4. Number of students by level (in thousands)

	1990	1994	1995
KINDERGARTEN	97.2	61.0	64.0
GENERAL SECONDARY (PRIMARY & SECONDARY)	440.9	381.2	403.8
TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL	29.1	7.5	7.9
SPECIAL VOCATIONAL	18.5	5.9	5.6
UNIVERSITY	17.3	27.9	31.9
EVENING SCHOOL	10.4	2.7	2.7
TOTAL	516.2	425.2	451.9

SOURCE: Mongolian Economy and Society in 1994 Statistical Year book, Ulaanbaatar, 1995, p. 118-124, MOSE Statistics in 1995-1996

Table 5. Education levels of persons over age 10 (based on latest census data)

	TOTAL NUMBER (IN THOUSANDS)	TOTAL PERCENTAGE	MALE	FEMALE
EDUCATED-TOTAL	1273.4	100	647.1	626.3
HIGHER EDUCATION	100.7	7.9	57.6	43.1
SPECIAL VOCATIONAL	113.5	8.9	43.5	70.0
UPPER SECONDARY	215.4	16.9	103.7	11.7
LOWER SECONDARY	403.7	31.7	229.0	174.7
PRIMARY	440.1	34.5	213.3	226.8

SOURCE: "National economy of the MPR for 70 years," Ulaanbaatar, 1991, p.21

Table 6. Percentage of state budget devoted to education (in millions TUG)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
TOTAL BUDGET	6,812.3	8,929.3	12,360.8	64,269.3	101,326
EDUCATION BUDGET	1,202.7	2,028	3,235.6	9,688.9	16,4
PERCENTAGE	17.6	22.7	26.2	15.1	16.2

SOURCE: Ibid.

Table 7. How many pupils from your class dropped out and from which grade?

	NUMBER
Drop-outs	
Total	388
Male	316
Female	72
Drop-outs by grade	
I	-
II	-
III	5
IV	38
V	74
VI	105
VII	86
VIII	80

SOURCE: MOSE

Table 8. Reasons students dropped out

REASON	NUMBER
Parents took child out to help with cattle breeding	144
No interest in studying	120
Unable to buy uniforms and textbooks	112
Unable to study	110
Parental skepticism towards school	96
Delinquency	80
Disabled	72
Poor Health	64
Unpleasant atmosphere at home	48
Bad living conditions in dormitories	32
Conflict with classmates	32
Lack of room in dormitories	16

SOURCE: MOSE